

HEAD OF THE TABLE.

MRS. NOBLE GAVE IT TO THE PRESIDENT IN HER HOUSE.

Not All the Talk About This Innovation Is Complimentary—On the Contrary, There Is Much Criticism, Which Is Here Summarized by Robert Graves.

(Special Correspondence.)

WASHINGTON, Feb. 27.—We have a new state question at the national capital—a question which attracts more attention and is more generally and more earnestly discussed than the tariff or the silver questions. It is, "Shall the president of the United States sit at the head of the table when he is invited out to dinner?" This great problem was thrust upon us by the innovation which Mrs. Noble, wife of the secretary of the interior, recently made on the occasion of a dinner at her handsome home at which the president was the chief guest. Mrs. Noble stationed the president at the head of the table.

This innovation was not a sudden freak, but the result of careful inquiry and a great deal of thought and consultation. Let no one imagine that Mrs. Noble rushed into such a striking experiment without due deliberation. She has for a long time had the notion that the chief magistrate of the nation should sit at the head of the table when dining out, and to make sure she wrote to England and ascertained authoritatively that the practice there was for the sovereign always to occupy the seat at head of table, whether in her own house or that of another. Mrs. Noble then inquired at the state department if any good reason was known there why the president should not sit at the head of her table, as would Queen Victoria while in the house of a subject, and she received the reply that there was no rule one way or the other, and that a hostess was at liberty to exercise her own discretion and taste. Then Mrs. Noble decided to try the new idea, and thus it came about that the president was a few days later somewhat surprised to find himself at the head of Secretary Noble's table, with Mrs. Noble at his right and Secretary Noble at the other end of the board.

At once the world of society began to wag its busy tongue. For ten days our social devotees, men and women, have talked of little else than Mrs. Noble's new wrinkle. It is needless to say that a thousand different opinions are entertained and expressed, and that the bold cabinet lady has her critics as well as her champions. At the present moment the hostile faction clearly outnumber the other, and at most of the teas and receptions poor Mrs. Noble is being hauled over the coals in a particularly lively fashion. Those who do not like the innovation comment that it is a disgusting imitation of English style, which is monarchical and aristocratic and not at all suitable for democratic America. They point out that, while it is true Queen Victoria occupies the head of the table wherever she goes, the custom in England is based upon the fiction that the sovereign is supreme in all things and all things, and consequently cannot be permitted to occupy an attitude in the least suggesting inferiority to any other person whatever.

Under this theory the queen would, by sitting at the right of her hostess, confess that she did not own the house in which the table was spread, and consequently that she was not mistress there and was for the time being a subject sojourning in a castle where another was ruler. This sort of thing may be dreadfully humiliating in England, but it is not in accordance with American ideas.

When Queen Victoria graciously informs a subject that she will be pleased to dine at his table in response to an invitation from him, her acceptance is in the form of a command that rests upon the monarchial fiction that she will simply partake of her own under her loyal attendance. In England the host abdicates when the sovereign is present. Over there they think the queen would not be a sovereign if she recognized the proprietary right of the host. The British notion about these things is that the sovereign has ultimate property in everything, while what the subject has he has only to hold and enjoy at her pleasure. In order to keep up this somewhat absurd fiction the queen must sit at the head of her host's table.

Now, it happens that the president of the United States is not a sovereign. He has no ultimate property in things and makes no pretense toward having. It is not necessary for him to act when he goes out into society on the assumption that he has absolute mastery of the earth, that he is supreme everywhere and in all things, and that he takes with him to the banquet hall or the conversation room all the greatness of the office which he chances to fill for a period of four years. On the contrary, the president makes no such pretensions or assumptions.

This is the way the more sensible of the men and women of Washington have talked about the innovation made by Mrs. Noble. Down to this time no other lady of the cabinet has had the courage to follow Mrs. Noble's example, and I have heard that the president himself does not like the new style and has quietly whispered his disapproval of it. As the gossip goes in the drawing rooms of the fashionable world Mrs. Noble has not only made a mistake in trying to imitate British royalty in free America, but she went far beyond her authority in endeavoring to change social precedence all by herself.

There is no written social law in this country. It is true, and the unwritten law has no official sanction, inasmuch as we have no court chamberlain or high authority of that sort in this capital. But the social precedents and customs are pretty well settled, nevertheless, and well understood, have been followed for many, many years, and are not to be changed in a day or a night by the wife of a cabinet officer, estimable lady and worthy hostess though she is. In the absence of any good reason why the unwritten law which prevails among civilized people should be changed and the place of honor at the host's right be shifted to some other seat, Washington society is agreed that no innovations should be attempted or permitted.

As a matter of fact, the president of the United States dines out in Washington, not as president but distinctly as a private person, informally. He could not dine out as president without violating the unwritten law governing his conduct which has obtained for many years. The president has vast official power, but he is held in restraint by certain social conventions and precedents which have come down through tradition since the foundation of the government. The president never returns a call except the first call of a visiting patentee or member of a royal family, or the executive authority of a foreign state or nation. He may give state dinners and appropriate state social entertainments, but he cannot accept an invitation to return. He may extend his patronage to suitable occasions of public interest or enterprise. He may invite a person of so-

cial or official prominence or a personal friend to dine with him, but he is not permitted to accept an invitation to dine in return.

An exception to this rule is in the case of a member of his own cabinet, whose board he may sit at if he likes, though he could decline such an invitation without offense; but when dining out the tradition, the unwritten law, is plain and distinct, that he goes as a private person and not as the president. Hence it is manifestly as improper to place the president at the head of his host's table as it would be to place any other modest and humble citizen there.

Of course President Harrison does not confine himself strictly to the letter of what is known as the unwritten law, and takes upon himself the right to depart in some measure therefrom, as did most of his predecessors. If he did not he would be to a great extent, so far as his social intercourse in Washington is concerned, almost like a prisoner in a magnificent state jail. President Harrison occasionally dines with senatorial friends, or with old friends who are in private life, and two or three weeks ago he was a guest of the newspaper correspondents of the capital on the occasion of their annual dinner. All this is violation of the code of etiquette, but the president probably feels that he has as much right as other people have to get a little fun out of life as he goes along. An odd feature of the social code governing presidents of the United States is that they may go as much as they please while away from the capital—to dinners and parties and everything that attracts them—but in Washington they must be sober and stately.

One of the pretty presidential traditions is that as the chief magistrate walks about the city all men who meet him should salute by uncovering their heads. President Harrison, for instance, is fond of walking, and frequently is seen pacing up Connecticut avenue. Not all the men who meet him salute, I am sorry to say, but a majority of them do, whether they have personal acquaintance with him or not. This is not an acknowledgment of sovereignty or anything of that sort, as in the case of giving him the head of the table, but a mere courtesy, a polite mark of respect to his high office and his exalted character as a citizen. Another pretty custom that is growing in general use in Washington is for the mothers of young ladies who are just about to come out in society to present them to the wife of the president by appointment before they make their debut. Of course there is no ceremony about this, and it does not at all correspond to being presented to the queen of England, but it is a mark of respect to her who is concededly the first lady of the land.

In some respects the unwritten law governing the social phases of the presidential office is modeled after the English model. For instance, an invitation to dine at the executive mansion may not be declined except in case of death in the immediate family of the invited guest. In this event the reason should be stated in a letter of regret, or in a subsequent communication in case an acceptance had already been signified. Any invitation of a social nature from the president is regarded in Washington not only as a courtesy, but as a command not to be lightly set aside or treated.

A large number of people who ought to know better persist in speaking of the president, or in addressing him through the mails, as "Your Excellency," or something equally high sounding. The chief magistrate of the United States is not entitled to any such appellation. In conversation he is always addressed "Mr. President." In official documents he is always "The President," and the superscriptions of communications from congress, from the department of the government, or from the supreme court are invariably "To the President." Even in the informal relations of personal friends he is properly "Mr. President," and any other form of address is presumptuous. To members of his own family in conversation with others he is "The President." He is neither an honorable nor an esquire, nor an "excellency" nor yet a "highness"—he is in the constitution, in law, in tradition and so recognized simply "the president" and nothing else.

The proper relations of the president and his household to other officers of the government and to the people are now well understood, and if Mrs. Noble had stopped to think of the difficulty our forefathers had in bringing order out of chaos in these matters it is not likely she would have endeavored to change the customs that have obtained for many years. When Washington became president the social customs of the new government had to be created along with the government itself. There was neither rule nor precedent. The people were to a great degree unaccustomed to the conventionalities of official station. Washington himself related how for a time after he assumed the presidential office his house was thronged night and day by people who had no business with him, who were for the most part actuated by mere curiosity. The eager crowds forced their way into the private apartments of the president, and even Mrs. Washington's bedchamber was invaded.

To relieve himself of these and many other embarrassments, Washington prepared a large number of queries which he submitted to Vice President Adams and the members of his cabinet for their advice. The president wanted to know whether he should exclude himself from all sorts of company; whether one day a week would suffice for visits of compliment; whether the president should or should not receive persons on business; and he asked advice as to the number of dinners he should give each year, whether or not he should go out to receptions and teas in an informal manner, and, finally, whether it was not his duty during the recesses of congress to make a tour of the country so as to acquaint himself with its needs.

It is worthy of note that Vice President Adams thought the president should as a rule have no intercourse with the public except at his levees, and that public business should be carried on through the ministers, an audience with the president himself being held as a rare favor, and to be arranged through one of the ministers.

There are public men today who think it would have been better to adopt that plan, and that it is not too late to adopt it now in order to relieve the president of the United States of the burden of receiving hundreds of callers every week, many of them about trifling matters which a cabinet officer should be competent to deal with. The country has grown so large that the democratic idea as carried out in the presidential office is fast becoming a nuisance, and the chief magistrate of the nation is compelled to give up two-thirds of his time and energy to matters of such small importance that in a railway corporation they would never be taken beyond a bureau chief, or at most a division superintendent, to say nothing of the general manager or president.

Neither John Adams nor Alexander Hamilton, John Jay nor Washington himself ever contemplated that the president should assert sovereignty and "ultimate property" by sitting at the head of his host's dinner table. ROBERT GRAVES.

HANDLES THE MONEY.

A. F. SEEBERGER, THE TREASURER OF THE WORLD'S FAIR.

A Financial Genius—His System of Collecting, Bookkeeping and Expenditures Is Remarkable—He Knows How to Save as Well as Spend Money.

(Special Correspondence.)

CHICAGO, Feb. 27.—Every week day morning in the year, be the weather fair or foul, the air balmy or filled with reminders of the plains of Manitoba, a neatly dressed man with kindly but determined features, silver white hair and beard and a profile that now reminds you of Senator Palmer and now again of Jefferson Davis in his last years, may be seen, just after the clock in the tall tower of the board of trade near by has chimed the hour of 9, to leisurely push open the doors of the Rand-McNally building and stop before the east end elevator. The grand mogul of the aerial conveyance unbends his dignity long enough to touch his cap, and the man with the kindly countenance gives him a nod and smile in return.

The car stops at the fourth floor, and the gray bearded passenger, in two steps, crosses the corridor and passes into an office, through the open doors of which you get a glimpse of iron grailings and big safes and sometimes of high piles of silver dollars and big rolls of paper currency. All the money that is subscribed under the local management for the purposes of the World's fair has to pass through these railings to the other side; all the money that is expended for the purpose of the World's fair has to pass from the inside to the outside. It is the office of that very necessary adjunct of every enterprise, commercial or patriotic, the treasurer.



A. F. SEEBERGER.

It takes financial genius to conduct the financial affairs of such a gigantic undertaking as the World's fair, and A. F. Seeberger has just that genius. That was why, in the initial stages of the undertaking, he was selected over the heads of hundreds of men of money and executive ability who would have been proud of the honor. He did not seek for it. On the contrary, it was offered to him by unanimous vote of the directorate. At the last annual election he was re-elected without the formality of a show of hands, and the same history will repeat itself next month and next year and the next, so long as there is a dollar of World's fair money to be handled. From the window of his private room Treasurer Seeberger can see the custom house, where for four years, under the administration of Grover Cleveland, he held court in the responsible office of collector of the port. But he would not change places today with the occupant of that office. No politician, national, state or local, especially the latter, bother him now.

Even the most expert bookkeeper or inventor (if the terms may be used) of systems of keeping financial accounts would open his eyes if he could see some of the methods that have been put into successful operation by Treasurer Seeberger. But they are not public property, and if you were to inquire concerning them they would simply look wise and shake their heads. There are within a few score of 30,000 subscribers to World's fair stock, and Treasurer Seeberger can tell you in thirty seconds just how much any one of the 30,000 has paid and how much that particular one still owes. He can tell you in the same space of time just how much money has been received up down the hour that he is talking to you from the commencement of the enterprise, how much has been paid out, how much the balance is, where it is, how much he is going to pay out in the next forty-eight hours and in the next six days, how much he is likely to get in within a thousand dollars just how his finances will stand a week to come.

To bring the money end of an immense undertaking down to such a fine point as this takes both brains and system, and Treasurer Seeberger is blessed with an abundance of both. Sometimes he has to sit as a judge and listen to the appeals of stockholders who started out with good intentions and who find themselves stranded by the wayside, and seek an extension of the time within which they are expected to meet the calls upon their holdings. Most of such applicants come from the ranks of the working classes, and it would surprise a good many people to know the number of wage earners whose patriotism has led them to become stockholders in the enterprise. Nevertheless he will never fail to give the deserving applicant all the time he wants to pay up. But let the man who tries to impose on him beware. He may tell a plausible story, and tell it with tears in his eyes, but the fraud will be penetrated, and instead of leniency he will get vigorous retribution.

Not only is Treasurer Seeberger a money getter, but he is also a money saver. So far he has taken in nearly \$5,000,000 and disbursed two-thirds of it. Yet the cost of collection and disbursement, including salaries and his own department's proportion of the rent, postage, stationery and all incidentals of every kind, has been less than 1 1/2 per cent. Such a record as this would be considered marvelous even for the most eminent financiers of the New or Old World. And it has been accomplished by a simple, unassuming Chicago hardware merchant. If you happened to meet him in a group around the fireplace at the Union League club of an evening, smoking his cigar and listening to, or himself telling, a good story, you would not select him at first glance as an executive giant of finance. Nevertheless he will never when the end has come, no more enduring monument than the financial records of the World's Columbian exposition. HENRY M. HURT.

LEW WALLACE'S NEW NOVEL.

This Said He Had Been Offered an Unprecedented Price for It. [Special Correspondence.]

NEW YORK, Feb. 23.—A story has been circulating among New York publishers that General Lew Wallace has received an offer from one publisher of \$30,000 bonus and a royalty of 50 per cent. on every copy of his new novel, the manuscript of which is about completed.

If this report is correct, and some of the publishers are inclined to believe it, it is the largest sum ever offered for a work of fiction to an American writer. The offer of 50 per cent. royalty indicates that the book will be a high priced one, for it must sell for as much as \$1.75 in order to bring any profit to the publishers after paying one-half of the retail price to General Wallace. Larger sums of money have been offered distinguished writers, but never for a novel. In England, however, as much as this sum has been offered to George Eliot received from her publishers a bonus of \$40,000 for "Middlemarch" and something like \$30,000 for "Daniel Deronda." Not even Dickens commanded such a sum as this, although he received from Robert Bonner \$5,000 for a short Christmas story, and he estimated that had he been paid for "Copperfield" or "Dombey and Son" a proportionate rate, he would have earned something like \$300,000 for each of these novels.

Of course General Wallace owes this offer to the extraordinary success of "Ben Hur." His profits from that novel alone must have given him a comfortable fortune, although publishers who are familiar with the facts say that the amount which is popularly credited to him as his share of the earnings of the book is too large. Had General Wallace known when he sent his manuscript to the Harpers that his book was to be one of the monumental successes of fiction, and had they known it, too, he could have made terms which probably would have brought him more than \$150,000. As it is, the best opinion among publishers is that his receipts were between \$50,000 and \$60,000. Something like 800,000 copies of the book have been sold, showing that it is pressing very closely upon the high water mark of American novels which was attained by "Uncle Tom's Cabin." But of this vast number of copies nearly one-half was issued in a cheap and popular form, so that the receipts for royalties could not have been a very large figure.

Of course everybody is now familiar with the interesting story of how "Ben Hur" became popular, how it attracted and held the attention when it was first published, how General Wallace and the publishers regarded it as a flat failure, at least so far as popularity was concerned. How more than a year had passed before the Harpers began to notice an increased demand, and how for a time their presses ran night and day to supply the market with it when it became popular.

There is a vague idea that the praise of General Garfield had something to do with this popularity, and that is the truth. After Garfield became president, one day, after an unusual siege with office seekers and office holders, he was found by a friend stretched out on a sofa in his private room in the White House reading a novel. He showed the book to the friend and said that he had turned to it because its fascinating story gave him genuine mental rest, because it furnished a stimulus and caused him to forget the vicissitudes and perplexities of war and wear and tear of his office. T. W. Garfield told the story of how Wallace, a soldier and a diplomat should have turned his attention, when the years were beginning to come upon him, to literature; and Garfield told the story of how Wallace, with a little army of 3,000 or 4,000 soldiers, had saved the nation's capital in the summer of 1864. And he said he sometimes wondered as he read this book which was the greater achievement intellectually, the fighting of the battle of Monocacy or the writing of "Ben Hur."

Garfield's friend told this anecdote to a newspaper correspondent, who sent it to his paper, omitting, however, as of trivial importance, what Garfield had said about the battle. The anecdote was widely copied, so that people wondered what the book "Ben Hur" was to which the president turned when he sought rest from his anxieties of office. Preachers read it and commended it to their Sunday schools and their congregations, and so, without any newspaper notoriety excepting that chance anecdote of Garfield and the book, it had become a great popular success before the critics were aware of it.

It will probably become a traditional illustration of the capacity of the great masses to discover for themselves merit without the aid of the critics.

The register of the United States treasury during Mr. Lincoln's administration, Mr. Chittenden, has recently published a volume of his recollections of Lincoln and Washington during the exciting days of the war. It devotes a chapter to the battle of Monocacy, and he almost rivals the graphic descriptions contained in "Ben Hur" when he describes General Wallace's achievement on that field. With a little army he faced and held at bay Jubal Early, who with 40,000 men was descending upon the capital from the north.

While Grant was pounding away at the intrenchments before Petersburg, Early had stolen off with his army to threaten and catch the capital if possible. Wallace met him at the Monocacy. He knew that his little army could not withstand Early, but he also knew that if he stood there and fought he would delay Early and thus give Grant time to send an army corps to the defense of the capital. He fought for one entire day and part of another, and his defense if not as dramatic was at least as heroic as that of the little band at Marathon. Of course his little army was wiped out, but when Early had reached the intrenchments in front of Washington, he found the Sixth corps had just arrived and was ready to give him battle.

To the military men Wallace's achievement at the Monocacy will stand unequalled as one of the most brilliant exploits of the war, but to the vast masses he is going to be better known as the author of "Ben Hur." E. J. EDWARDS.

Washington's Gridiron Club. The Gridiron club is composed of forty Washington correspondents and the number of members is limited. It is a dining club, pure and simple, having a monthly dinner during the winter season, and an annual dinner to which an invitation is esteemed a great honor by the most important public men of the day. At the recent dinner speech was made by the president of the United States, by the members of his cabinet, General Schenck, of the army, and many number of senators and representatives. As an after dinner speaker the president proved very acceptable, but no word of what he said has found its way into print for the reason that the sessions of the Gridiron are strictly executive. This unique and admirable club has only two rules—"Ladies are always present at the dinners of this club, and reporters are never present."

A Wife in a Million.

A remarkable divorce case was recently on in one of the most staid and steady of New England's conservative cities. A wife applied for divorce from her husband in order to give him opportunity to marry a woman whom he liked better than he did himself. That wife was as much of a philosopher as the great John Ruskin, who gave up his wife to a painter friend and allowed a divorce when he found she cared more for the other man than he did for him.

The New England wife and the other woman were schoolmates and the belles of the city in which they lived. Both were so beautiful and so popular that it was hard to make choice between them.

A thriving young business man made choice, however, or thought he did. That he was not sure was proved by the sequel. No sooner had he taken one of them to wife than, apparently, he began to wish he had the other, or maybe both of them. At any rate the beautiful woman he had married presently began to find herself "alone day and night and Sundays." She found the cause to be her old schoolmate and friend. Then this philosophical wife simply said:

No one could blame a man for falling in love with her, for she is so pretty. They are now knitted like steel together and no one can separate them. If the court will be good enough to grant me a decree, then they can become just what they have wanted to be for so long a time.

Maybe when the fickle husband gets the other beauty for his wife he will look regretfully to beauty No. 1 and conclude she was the best after all.

The Boston Waiters' alliance that was organized a year or two ago and put into its platform the main plank of no fees to waiters has received assurances that similar alliances have also been formed in various other cities. The next move to which the Boston alliance looks ahead is the formation of a national organization. Then the national convention of United States waiters will hold its annual convention at Washington along with other learned and scientific bodies.

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The "new things" are what you want to hear about and see nowadays. March will soon be here, and March is the threshold of Spring—the season of "new things." We have made a special effort to get novelties in every department for the Early Spring trade—successfully.

Do you know "Fairy Cloth"? Probably not, because it's just out. The name describes its looks. A child's Spring Cloak or a lady's Dressing Sacque is a dream if properly made of it—delicate shades and dark.

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Unprincipled Opposition.

The agents of a certain publisher are now visiting our merchants, soliciting patronage for a directory, and as a means of securing such patronage are circulating a report that Moffat's Directory will not be issued this year. I need hardly remind business men that when a man has to lie in order to get patronage that he will not hesitate to cheat. If I can only come across some of those agents I will put them out of the way for the directory season, and in the meantime I hope our Bloomfield merchants will show them the door.

MOFFAT'S DIRECTORY.

of Bloomfield and Montclair will be issued this year as usual and the public is assured that they will get a directory as accurate as it is possible to make one. Thanking you for your patronage in the past and soliciting a continuance of the same, I am Yours respectfully, F. N. MOFFAT.

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